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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 TEL AVIV 005285

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SUBJECT: DISENGAGEMENT SITUATION REPORT, AUGUST 26, 2005

REF: TEL AVIV 5258

This is a joint message from Embassy Tel Aviv and Consulate General Jerusalem.

This message is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

This message conveys information as of 1700 hours local time.

11. (SBU) Summary: The Israeli cabinet is expected to approve on August 28 an agreement with Egypt allowing Egypt to post 750 Border Guards on the Egypt-Gaza border. Meanwhile, Israeli pundits and the weekend press ponder the impact of disengagement. The Israeli daily Yedioth Ahronot reported August 26 that 54 percent of Israelis would be in favor of further pullouts from Jewish settlements in the West Bank, as opposed to 42 percent who say they oppose further withdrawals. The residents of the West Bank settlements of Mevo Dotan and Hermesh, which are situated near the evacuated settlements of Gannim, Kaddim, Sa Nur and Homesh, asked August 25 to be evacuated in exchange for compensation as part of the disengagement plan. A spokesman for the Israeli Interior Ministry reported that even after factoring in Israel's evacuation of 21 settlements in Gaza and four in the West Bank this week, the overall number of Israelis now living in the West Bank has grown by about 12,800 so far this year to a total of 246,000. End Summary.

12. (U) DISENGAGEMENT STATUS:

Gaza Strip:

-- According to Israeli press, the evacuation of the 48 graves in the Neve Dekalim cemetery will begin on August 28, and is expected to take five days. The Director of the Human Resources Branch of the IDF said the coffins will be draped with the Israeli flag and will be driven in ambulances to the cemeteries of the families' request, either the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem or the cemetery in Nitzan. The families will return to the cemetery August 26 for a final visit before the transfer begins on Sunday.

-- According to Palestinian press, the IDF removed a military post yesterday west of Netzarim.

West Bank:

-- A spokesman for the Israeli Interior Ministry, Gilad Heiman, in a report picked up by Ha'aretz, said that even after factoring in Israel's evacuation of 21 settlements in Gaza and four in the West Bank this week, the overall number now living in the West Bank has grown by about 12,800 so far this year to a total of 246,000.

-- Israeli press reported August 25 that the residents of the settlements of Mevo Dotan and Hermesh asked to be evacuated in exchange for compensation as part of the disengagement plan. Mevo Dotan and Hermesh are home to 50 families and 30 families, respectively, and both settlements reportedly do not have the same sense of security since the evacuations of neighboring settlements Gannim, Kaddim, Sa Nur and Homesh in the northern West Bank. (Note: The IDF is also evacuating a military base next to Mevo Dotan. End note.) The press reports indicate that the residents of the two settlements are unhappy with the checkpoints and roadblocks the IDF is erecting to protect the settlers against terrorist attacks. The GOI has denied their request for evacuation, and reportedly wants to evacuate the settlements as part of a political deal with the Palestinian Authority rather than as a unilateral move.

13. (SBU) SECURITY SITUATION

Gaza Strip:

-- Israeli and Palestinian security officials met at Erez on August 25 to discuss the handover of settlement areas to the PA. The officials agreed to define a buffer zone area in northern Gaza. Another meeting will be held on August 29.

-- Mortars: A Palestinian mortar round landed in the western Negev on August 26, according to media accounts. No injuries or property damage were reported. A mortar shell fired at an

IDF base early August 26 in the northern Gaza Strip landed in an open field. There were no casualties and no damage. Late on August 25 (2315) a mortar shell landed near an IDF outpost at Rafiah Yam, according to IDF reports.

-- The Al-Nasir Salah-al-Din Brigades, the military wing of the Popular Resistance Committees, on 25 August carried on its website a military communique claiming responsibility for firing a Nasir-3 rocket that day on the Israeli town of Sederot. The statement said that the operation was an initial response to the "Zionist grudge and the heinous massacres, the latest of which was the assassination of five citizens from the city of Tulkarm, including commanders and mujahidin from our brothers at the Al-Aqsa and Al-Quds brigades."

-- PA police reported to UN sources that Hamas' Qassam Brigades held a "show of strength" demonstration between Jabalya and Beit Hanoun, August 26.

West Bank:

-- Shooting: The IDF reported a shooting incident at an IDF outpost near Kadim at 2250 on August 25.

-- Stabbing: A Palestinian stabbed a border policeman in Hebron, wounding him lightly.

-- Funerals of the five Palestinians killed in Tulkarm August 24 took place without incident. The Popular Resistance Committees and Islamic Jihad claimed the responsibility for August 25 rockets attacks (reftel) as retaliation.

14. (U) PALESTINIAN REACTIONS

-- The Palestine National Council (PNC), the PLO's legislative body, August 25 emphasized that Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and some parts of the West Bank must be completed through rebuilding the port and the crossing points and enabling the Palestinian people to move and travel freely. In a statement marking the Israeli withdrawal that was disseminated by the official news agency of the Palestinian Authority, the PNC stressed the necessity to link the Gaza Strip to the West Bank and enable the Palestinian people to control their airspace, territorial waters, the crossing points, and borders. The statement noted that the continuing Israeli control of these areas does not change the legal status of the Gaza Strip and does not mean that the Israeli government has fulfilled its obligations and implemented international resolutions.

-- Hamas held a rally in Deir al Balah in the Gaza Strip to celebrate Israeli disengagement.

15. (U) GOI POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

-- The Israeli cabinet is expected to meet on Sunday, August 28 and to endorse an agreement that will enable the deployment of an Egyptian border guard force along the Philadelphi corridor. The agreement, which is likely to come to the Knesset for approval on August 31, will make it possible for the IDF to withdraw from the road situated on the border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip.

-- The Labor Party is likely to quit the government by November now that the disengagement plan has been implemented, according to Labor Party Secretary-General and MK Eitan Cabel, speaking to Israel Radio.

-- The Israeli daily Yedioth Ahronot reported August 26 that 54 percent of Israelis would be in favor of further pullouts from Jewish settlements in the West Bank, as opposed to 42 percent who say they oppose further withdrawals.

-- An Israeli court in the Negev ordered August 25 the release of some 180 disengagement opponents who were arrested at Kfar Darom. MK Uri Ariel from the National Union party reacted: "I am happy that finally there is some sanity. The arrest of minors was unnecessary."

16. (U) CROSSINGS

Rafah: Defense Minister Sha'ul Mofaz on August 25 proposed operating the Rafah terminal as a one-way border crossing from the Gaza Strip to Egypt, after Israel completes its withdrawal from the Strip and the Philadelphi route. According to the proposal Mofaz presented to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on August 25, Palestinians would be able to leave the Gaza Strip for Sinai without Israel's presence or intervention. People and goods entering the Strip would pass via a new terminal near Kerem Shalom, under the supervision of the Israeli customs authority. The Defense Ministry could build the new terminal within six weeks, Mofaz said, noting that the head of the tax authority, Eytan Rub, approved the proposal.

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